



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR FISHERIES AND MARITIME AFFAIRS

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Mr. Iain MacSween
Chairman
Pelagic Regional Advisory Council
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The Netherlands

Subject: Pelagic stock issues

Dear Mr. MacSween

In my letter of 24th. April I wrote that my services would need a little more time to consider the issues you raised in your letter of 30th. March, but I can now provide a detailed reply to the points you raise.

I will divide my reply into a general section, one concerning management issues and one concerning research issues.

1. General Issues

The Commission's communication on achieving maximum sustainable yields (MSY) will shortly be published and will set out our views in detail on the next steps to take concerning that policy initiative. The elements you refer to - a limit in TAC variation of 15% and a year-to-year flexibility of 10% could be useful elements in harvest rules leading to MSY targets. The Commission also believes that harvest rules to implement MSY should be developed in consultation with the relevant sector, and that transitional economic and social impacts should be evaluated.

However, you will be aware that for the major shared pelagic stocks such rules will have to be developed together with the other relevant coastal states.

2. Management Issues

2.1. Herring in Division VI(S), VIIbc

There is a great deal of uncertainty about the biological state of this stock because of the absence of a reliable scientific survey. I do not think it useful to address the questions of quantitative management targets and reference points until this stock can be assessed reliably.

2.2. Herring in Division VIa(N)

A management plan is indeed under development for this stock, taking into consideration the ICES advice and the RAC advice concerning the harvest rule for setting TACs. The pelagic RAC has been consulted at the meeting of 21st. June on the basis on a non-paper setting out the Commission's current thinking. This will be followed up with a Commission proposal, including an impact assessment.

2.3. Herring in subdivisions 22-24 and Division IIIa (spring spawners)

The Commission requested ICES for improved clarification on the catch forecasting for this stock (especially in Division IIIa) in 2005. I expect that ICES will have considerably improved the clarity of its advice for this area in its report of June 2006.

2.4. Herring in subarea IV, VIIId

The Commission believes that the management plan should be flexible enough that a larger reduction in TAC than 15% could be taken if this is required because of the state of the stock (for example, in the case of a series of low recruitments), and therefore does not favour amending paragraphs 5 and 6 of the management plan.

The Commission agrees that a 10% interannual flexibility in TACs could be a desirable attribute of long-term plans, but as this is a shared stock with Norway it would be necessary to develop joint rules for the operation of such a system. This can be further examined in consultation with Norway.

2.5. Norwegian Spring-Spawning herring

As for North Sea herring, the Commission agrees that a 10% interannual flexibility in TACs could be desirable, and could be further examined in consultation with the other Coastal States during 2006.

Concerning the B_{lim} and B_{pa} levels, the current values of 2.5 million t and 5.0 million t respectively have been established on the basis of scientific advice in 1998. The Commission is not aware of any new developments since then that could indicate that the values are no longer appropriate. If the pelagic RAC wishes any specific new information taken into account, a more detailed request should be provided.

2.6. North East Atlantic Mackerel

Concerning year-to-year flexibility in TACs, comments made above concerning herring stocks apply here also.

The Commission agrees that the management plan for mackerel could be improved by providing for the possibility of the stock falling into a poor biological condition. Although stock development is uncertain, this eventuality seems unlikely in the near future given the good state of the stock and the recent improvements in control and enforcement. The Commission does not therefore see this as an urgent priority area, but remains open to looking into this in 2007 on the basis of scientific advice.

2.7. Blue whiting

Management of quotas is a responsibility of Member States and the Commission does not consider that quota swaps between private organisations have a place in regulations at the Community level.

3. Outstanding research issues

3.1. General

Substantial Community research effort is already being spent on extensive surveys for pelagic species (see Annex), and it is not seen as an immediate priority to increase Community funds for research for pelagic stocks over that presently scheduled.

However, a review of the needs and requirements of scientific advice will be completed by the Commission when a new implementing regulation for the "Data Collection Regulation" is prepared. In preparation for this review, the Commission is presently planning an STECF meeting to consider the adequacy of data and assessment methods for pelagic stocks and to recommend any necessary improvements.

3.2. New request for advice concerning stocks with no assessment

The Commission has, as part of a wider initiative, asked ICES to provide advice on harvest rules even in situations where the availability of information is limited. Such methods could perhaps be applicable to VIa(S) herring, and I will raise this suggestion with ICES.

3.3. Mackerel

The Commission will ask ICES to investigate in the course of its annual advisory cycle on possible amendments to the harvest rule to include specific measures to be applied should the stock fall outside safe biological limits.

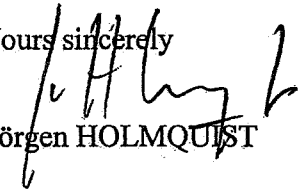
Concerning the "Annex III" research issues, the Commission agrees that these should be considered in the context of the review of the Data Collection Regulations (see 3.1.).

3.4. Blue whiting and Horse Mackerel

A review of the needs for improved data and assessment of blue whiting (including an evaluation of the juvenile fishery) could be included as part of the review described in Section 3.1. However, such a review would not undertake a direct assessment of these stocks but rather look at data quality and assessment methods.

Thank you for your positive and helpful contributions. I look forward to maintaining a close contact with the Pelagic RAC.

Yours sincerely


Jörgen HOLMQUIST

c.c:

Messrs Farnell, Penas, Gariazzo, Lamplmair, Patterson, Hagström,
Degnbol, Ms Garcia-Ferrer

ANNEX: Current requirements under Commission implementation Reg. 1581/2004 (Data collection)

1. Specific effort

For all Mackerel and Horse mackerel stocks: $Kw.days^{-1}$ and $GT.day^{-1}$ by type of fishing technique (app. VIII) at division level, on a quarterly basis.

2. Landings reports & Discard samplings

ICES areas I, II

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV

MP : Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES div

EP : Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle

Discards : Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

Horse mackerel *Trachurus trachurus* IIa, IVa, Vb, VIa, VIIa-c, e-k, VIIIabde

MP: Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES div

EP : Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle

Discards: Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

ICES area IIIa (north)

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV

MP : Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES div

EP : (Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle

Discards : Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

Mackerel *Scomber scombrus* IIIa, IVbc, VIId

MP : Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES div

EP : Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle

Discards : Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

ICES area III (excluding Skagerrak), including Baltic

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV

MP : Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES div

EP : Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle

Discards : Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

ICES areas IV, VIId

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV

MP : Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES div

EP : Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle)

Discards : Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

Mackerel *Scomber scombrus* IIIa, IVbc, VIId

MP : Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES

EP : Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle

Discards : Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

Horse mackerel *Trachurus* spp. IIa, IVa, Vb, VIa, VIIa-c, e-k, VIIIabde; and IIIa, IVbc, VIId

MP: Yearly total by ICES divisions

EP: Quarterly total by ICES divisions

Discards: Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

ICES V, VI, VII (excluding d), VIII, IX, X, XII, XIV

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV

MP : Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES div

EP : Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle

Discards : Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

Mackerel *Scomber scombrus* II, IIIa, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX; and VIIIc, IXa

MP : Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES div

EP : Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle

Discards : Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

Horse mackerel *Trachurus trachurus* IIa, IVa, Vb, VIa, VIIa-c, e-k, VIIIabde; and VIIIc, IXa/X

MP : Quarterly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES-NAFO div

EP : Monthly by type of fishing technique (Appendix III) by ICES Statistical rectangle

Discards : Triennial (one yearly over a period of three years) by type of technique (Appendix III)

3. Age - Length sampling

Market sampling effort defined as the numbers of samples taken per average tonne of landings of the last three years, on an annual basis:

A 1/20

B 1/50

C 1/100

D 1/200

E 1/500

F 1/1 000

G 1/2 000

Length sampling level defined as the number of fish measured per sample:

0 400

1 200

2 100

3 50

4 25 or less as available

ICES areas I, II

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV length F3; age F3

Horse mackerel *Trachurus trachurus* IIa, IVa, Vb, VIa, VIIa-c, e-k, VIIIabde length F3; age F4

ICES area IIIa (north)

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV length F3; age F3

Mackerel *Scomber scombrus* IIIa, IVbc, VIIId length E3; age E3

ICES area III (excluding Skagerrak) including Baltic

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV length F3; age F3

North Sea and eastern Channel — ICES areas IV, VIIId

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV length F3; age F3

Mackerel *Scomber scombrus* IIIa, IVbc, VIIId length F3; age F4

Horse mackerel *Trachurus* spp. IIa, IVa, Vb, VIa, VIIa-c, e-k, VIIIabde; and IIIa, IVbc, VIIId length F2; age F4

NE Atlantic and western Channel — ICES areas V, VI, VII (excluding d), VIII, IX, X, XII, XIV

Blue whiting *Micromesistius poutassou* I-IX, XII, XIV length F3; age: F4

Mackerel *Scomber scombrus* II, IIIa, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX (excluding VIIIc, IXa) length F3; age F4

Mackerel *Scomber scombrus* VIIIc, IXa length D4; age D4

Horse mackerel *Trachurus trachurus* IIa, IVa, Vb, VIa, VIIa-c, e-k, VIIIabde/X length F3; age F4

Horse mackerel *Trachurus trachurus* VIIIc, IXa length D3; age E2

4. Other Biological sampling (Growth, Maturity, Fecundity and Sex ratio)

All stocks on a tri-annual basis